Southern Plains Inventory and Monitoring Network
Board of Directors Meeting
Las Animas, CO – Hosted by Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site and Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site
March 29, 2006

Attending: Karren Brown, Board Chair (Supt. LAMR/ALFL), Kevin McMurry Board Member (Supt. – FOLS), Chris Moos, Board Member (Supt. – CAVO), Alden Miller, Board Member (Chief of Resources and Facilities – WABA), Bruce Bingham, Board Member (IMR I&M Coordinator), Dusty Perkins, Board Member (Network Coordinator – SOPN), David Vela (Supt. – LYJO), Wendy Lauritzen (Supt. - WABA), Alexa Roberts (Supt. – SAND), Dennis Ditmanson (Supt. – PECO/FOUN), Fran Pannebaker (Chief of Natural Resources - BEOL), Karl Zimmerman (Park Ranger – BEOL/SAND), Paul Eubank, (Chief of Resources – LAMR/ALFL), Felix Revello (Supervisory Park Ranger – FOLS), Heidi Sosinski (Data Manager – SOPN)

Meeting Commence at 8:35.

The meeting opened with F. Pannebaker welcoming the group. F. Pannebaker, A. Roberts, BEOL, and SAND also provided refreshments, brochures, overhead projectors and a BEOL coffee mug to each attendee. MANY THANKS to the BEOL and SAND staff!

I. Presentation and Review of SOPN Vital Signs

A. Overview Presentation – D. Perkins and H. Sosinski began the meeting by presenting an overview presentation including background information on the national I+M program, the Southern Plains Network (SOPN), data management and the vital signs selection process.

B. SOPN Core Vital Signs – D. Perkins presented a brief description, preliminary objectives and justifications for each of the 10 core vital signs that had been selected by the technical committee (Table 1). The core vital signs were also presented according to management significance and where each vital sign would be monitored. C. Moos and D. Ditmanson noted that water quantity (groundwater levels) should also be monitored at CAVO and FOUN, respectively. K. Brown noted that LAMR should also monitor soil structure and chemistry and human demographics at LAMR. A list of 8 secondary and 10 tertiary vital signs was presented. The core vital signs are where SOPN is proposing to focus most of its time and monetary resources in the near future. Vital signs on the secondary and tertiary list would only be monitored if they could be done inexpensively (some other entity is collecting the data). A diagram showing how the vital signs were interconnected was presented which prompted a brief discussion regarding the difference between a driver and a stressor. It was asked why the model didn't connect exotic plants to soil structure? D. Perkins answered that the exotic plants vital sign was related to early detection, hence it was more appropriate landscape and human demographics.

C. Review and discussion of Vital Signs - D. Perkins opened the floor for discussion regarding the current 3-tiered list of vital signs.

- W. Lauritzen asked about funding security and Core Ops issues. D. Perkins answered that funding is pretty secure, with SOPN having full base funding. B. Bingham added that national leadership says funding is secure. SOPN hopes to augment existing monitoring and may be involved in assisting parks with analysis, presentation, or study design of existing monitoring programs. If a park were to drop a current monitoring program, SOPN may pick up the program if it fits within the core vital signs and/or with a decision of the Board of Directors. All monitoring that SOPN oversees will have to follow the WASO I+M protocols The I&M program can help existing park monitoring programs by bringing the protocol up to standard at the park's request. Parks may continue their own monitoring programs, even if they do not meet the I&M standards. B. Bingham also added that I+M networks are not included in the Core Ops, process but all of the networks go through a similar process with the Phase III report, and some (Rocky Mountain Network) have been asked by their board to do the entire core ops process.

- K. Zimmerman asked if SOPN will assist with data management for activities that generate a lot of data, one example being Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's (RMBO) spring and Christmas bird counts. D. Perkins stated that it depends on the monitoring protocol's standards and where those vital signs fit within SOPN's selected vital signs. There is much data taken that currently doesn't meet I&M standards. B. Bingham added that RMBO's breeding bird surveys are known to meet I&M standards.

- C. Moos asked that since we have 28 vital signs, 10 of which are on the first tier, and if we only have funding to cover 5, how will we choose which 5 to monitor? What is the theory behind monitoring 5 in-depth vs. monitoring all 10? B. Bingham said it is better to monitor 5 high quality vital signs very well instead of monitoring 10 vital signs at a lower standard. The Board has the authority to decide what will ultimately be monitored. F. Revello asked if it would it help to have tentative costs associated with the protocols to see how they interrelate? Can look at similar protocols and further focus on what vital signs we can afford. B. Bingham stated that we may not have dollar amounts, but we can determine which vital signs would be more costly to monitor. We may have some that will sap the budget and others that will be far less costly. D. Perkins said that we will get information on costs of 10 core vital signs in the next 18 months as protocols are developed.

- A. Roberts stated that SAND has started long-term planning and desired future conditions, which could be integrated with monitoring protocols. D. Perkins stated I+M at the national level is trying to see how monitoring fits with desired future conditions. B. Bingham stated that vital signs are

generally tracking ecosystem function rather than desired conditions. F. Revello stated that the process of ranking the vital signs for management significance has been helpful in discussions of desired future conditions at Fort Larned NHS.

- A motion was called to vote on the list of vital signs as presented (Table 1 - three-tiered list of 28 vital signs with 10 core, 8 secondary, and 10 tertiary vital signs). **Action Item: The Board unanimously voted to approve the list.**

D. Next Steps

- Phase 2 Report - D. Perkins presented information regarding the development of our phase 2 report which is due on October 1, 2006. It is likely that we will be able to finish this task several months early.

- D. Perkins presented some examples from other networks that show multiple forms of communication that the I+M program seeks to accomplish. B. Bingham commented that a task team was formed at Rio Rico to address vital signs communication. A follow-up workshop is currently scheduled tentatively for September 26-28 at Chico Hot Springs, Montana. Information will be sent out shortly. The focus audience is IMR superintendents and natural resource program managers. D. Perkins stated that SOPN can provide travel support for those coming to this workshop.

- Perkins asked if the network should produce something similar to the 4 page overview vital signs brochure that was developed by the National Capital Region I+M network and shown in the presentation. D. Vela responded that these publications work very well and can be used to attract stake holders. B. Bingham commented that some networks in this region that have brought on a communications specialist to cover this task and it may be possible to share this position among networks. D. Vela stated that Lyndon B. Johnson NHP had people with graphical skills that might be able to contribute to this overview brochure. Post Meeting Note: W. Lauritzen provided the names of a webpage developed (Marge Post), writer (Kristy Wallisch), and graphics (Gregg Baff) that are part of the multi-park Iditarod project. **Action Item: D. Perkins will pursue the development of a four-page overview brochure. Post Meeting Note – F. Pannebaker suggested seeing Western National Parks Association might be able to assist with this project.**

- D. Vela asked if there has been any word from Washington regarding new funds for avian bird flu monitoring? B. Bingham said that they have not heard anything, but that I+M networks or IPM programs would be likely places for this type of money.

II. Other SOPN Business

A. Update on progress since Jan 2006 meeting
   - Vegetation mapping – SOPN put together a vegetation mapping proposal with $40K and a variety of in-kind support (field assistance, cooperative agreement oversight, data management). SOPN has been informed by the vegetation mapping program that we will receive $267,500 in FY2006. This will provide us with funds to wrap up most of our projects (except CAVO, PECO and CHIC).
   - SAND rare species inventory – A cooperative agreement for $36,000 has been established with Colorado Natural Heritage Program. Plant and bird inventories are currently underway. We hope to cover reptile and amphibian inventories sometime in the future.
   - Bat Inventories – SOPN put a proposal in to the Desert Southwest CESU for bat inventories at the three NM parks, LAMR and WABA. Bats were left out of the initial mammal inventories because they require species-specific survey methods.
   - Prairie restoration – A 5-park proposal was ranked highly in the IMR and is being considered at the WASO level in the NRPP Disturbed Land fund source.
   - San Diego Meeting, Funding – The president's budget requested an additional $1 million to the I+M program to fully fund all 32 networks. Gary Williams gave some guidance on what will happen to inventory funds. Approximately $11-12 million will be kept in an inventory fund that will be allocated (in a yet unspecified way) to networks and parks to potentially fill inventory gaps. B. Bingham commented that it is critical to address long term strategies for inventory dollars. He will be meeting with G. Williams and others at the end of April to develop a long-term strategy.

B. SCEP Position Review
   - Tomye Zettner was offered and has accepted the biotechnican position, pending a background investigation. She is a student at Texas A&M University with an excellent plant background who has previously done quality work for SOPN as an intern. She will be working with us full-time this summer and part-time in the fall.

C. Water Quality Options
   - D. Perkins asked for input regarding water quality/quantity protocol development. And presented three options: hire a term GS 5/7/9 hydrologist; establish a cooperative agreement (Dr. Longley at Texas State and Dr. Troelstrup at South Dakota State are two options); or establish an interagency agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation. C. Moos asked if we could contract services for a specific project instead of writing an agreement with the BOR or University. A contract can provide stronger motivation compared to an interagency agreement. B. Bingham responded that a cooperative agreement can be cancelled anytime. P. Eubank asked if Sue Braumiller is part of the I&M program? D. Perkins responded that her position is funded from the Natural Resource Challenge, however we are not considering her for protocol development. B. Bingham commented that there may be other network hydrologists in subject-to-furlough positions that could assist SOPN. B. Bingham asked if this person would also

work on water quantity and surface/groundwater protocols? D. Perkins answered that ideally yes because this would make for a more attractive project. D. Ditmanson recommended that this matter first go the Technical Committee and then to the Board. **Action Item: D. Perkins will investigate all of the above options, discuss with Technical Committee and get back to the Board with more details.**

D. Phase II Report
- D. Perkins stated that the work is done for the Phase II report, except for the writing and review. He proposed a review schedule similar to the one used for the Phase I report. This would be a three week review with a conference call to discuss the draft, thus leaving sufficient time for any changes the Board of Directors or the Technical Committee may wish to make. A draft should be ready by late May or early June with plans to submit the Phase II Report in July.
- As discussed at the January 20, 2006 Board of Directors meeting, today's meeting will take the place of our annual SOPN meeting. As such, some conference calls that are longer than normal will be needed to review the Annual Administrative report and Draft Workplan (AARWP) and Phase II Report. **Action Item: Using conference calls in place of travel was approved.**

E. Budget Update
- SOPN currently has $68K that has yet to be designated. This money will be spent on the bat inventory if funded and protocol development. These funds can be also be used to fund Fiscal Year 2008's portion of 4-year agreements for protocol development with Colorado State University and Texas A+M University.
- D. Perkins asked for guidance from B. Bingham about starting monitoring before final protocols are approved. B. Bingham stated that there is no issue if collecting data is part of protocol development. D. Perkins stated that SOPN may begin pilot field seasons in 2007. This will give us information on costs and feasibility.

Meeting Adjourned at 2:30 PM.

Notes recorded by H. Sosinski (SOPN Data Manager).

Table 1. Selected vital signs pending approval from SOPN Board of Directors. A comprehensive monitoring program would include all of the vital signs listed below. The network will first allocate resources to core vital signs, and these will likely make up the majority of the monitoring program for the near future. Secondary and tertiary vital signs will be considered for monitoring when additional funding is made available, or if there are existing programs that make inclusion of these vital signs cost effective. Vital signs are listed in no particular order.

Core	Secondary	Tertiary
Grassland vegetation communities	Amphibian communities	Ungulates
Bird communities	Fish communities	Soil movement
Fire and fuel dynamics	Aquatic invertebrates	Weather patterns
Water quantity	Wet and dry deposition	Small mammal communities
Early detection – exotic plants	Upland spring communities	Moths and butterflies
Wetland vegetation communities	Native pollinators	Insect pests
Water quality	Effects of park visitors on natural resources	Plant pathogens
Soil structure and chemistry	Black-tailed prairie dogs	Flooding processes
Landscape dynamics		Lesser prairie chicken
Human demographic data		Fire ants